

## MARTIAL LAW

(Scene—A barracks. Mrs. Desmond, her daughter Winifred and maid are hunting for the colonel's quarters.)

Mrs. Desmond—What does he say in his letter? (Reads part of the letter aloud. Winifred tries to stop her and takes the letter from her when the affectionate terms are read. The music outside ceases.) "My own sweet darling—um—um—um—you are quite right in saying that I should tell my uncle, the colonel, of our engagement, for he is a father to me in every way, and we shall be really dependent on him when we marry; but, my sweetest—um—um—um—you have no idea what a terrifying person he is. It is all very well for you, my—um—um—um—to say you are not in the least frightened of him." So you are not in the least frightened of the colonel?

Winifred—Not the least, my dear.

Mrs. Desmond—(continuing the letter)—"Not in the least frightened of him; but you don't know him. Why should we not face him together? Get dear, kind Mrs. Desmond—ahem—to bring you down on Wednesday by the 11 o'clock train, and we will face him together. If we are still on parade, please go to my quarters, which you will find marked with a big cross on the accompanying plan, and wait for me. And now, my darling—um—um—um. There's your letter."

Francine (from window)—Oh, madame, mam'selle, ze regiment is dispersed, and ze soldiers are coming this way.

Winifred—Let me look. (Runs to window.)

Mrs. Desmond—Come away from the window! Never be so foolish as to let a man think he's worth watching for.

(The door is flung open, and Private Patrick Dwyer, in kersey, belt and forage cap, bursts in.)

Patrick—How's Moses and all the other blessed saints! Petitions in the master's room! Wirra, wirra, wirra! What shall I do?

Mrs. Desmond—Go and tell your master that two ladies are waiting for him.

(She evidently gets him out of the room and slams the door.)

Winifred (with helmet)—Look at this spiky thing.

Mrs. Desmond—My dear!

Winifred—We girls all wear soldier hats. Why shouldn't we wear soldier hats, too? I wonder if it is becoming?

(She puts the helmet on, Francine coming to her assistance and uttering little cries of admiration.)

Winifred (swaggering up and down)—What do you think of me as a soldier?

Present hum! Mar-rah! Now, I should like to meet that old colonel. Wouldn't I frighten him? I should say to him, "How dare you! How dare you interfere with your nephew when he wishes to marry Miss Winifred Gresham!"

Then I should draw my sword—oh, I must have a sword. (She rushes to the fireplace and takes the sword, knocking down the photo of Mrs. Desmond in doing it.)

Mrs. Desmond (picking up photo)—How rough you are, Winifred! Why, this is a photo of myself! I never gave one to Arthur Chester, but I did once give one to—That tunic is not Arthur Chester's! It has medals on it and a colonel's lace. My dear, we've got into the wrong quarters! These are—

The Colonel outside, in a thunderous voice!—In my room, you say?

Patrick—Yes, sir; but it's not my fault.

Winifred—Help me out of these things, Francine! I'm so frightened. (Business.)

The Colonel—Hold your tongue, idiot, and open the door. (She faces, with hair, He is in blue serge uniform.)

The Colonel—You are all under arrest!

Mrs. Desmond—John!

The Colonel—Silence, woman! (Pointing to Winifred.) Make that girl a prisoner!

Mrs. Desmond—John, you don't mean this?

The Colonel (trotting voice)—Not a bit. Arthur came this morning and told me everything, and I gave my consent. He showed me the girl's letter, and I read that she wasn't frightened at me. If she's to be my niece and come into the regiment, she's got to be frightened of me, and so I'm going to frighten her. That's all. You must play the game.

Mrs. Desmond—You kept my portrait all this time?

The Colonel—All this time! We'll chat about that later.

The Colonel (sitting, to Winifred)—Are you aware that you are under military law? (Winifred gives a frightened "No" to all questions.) Do you know that to make the queen's uniform look ridiculous is a crime? Do you know what short drill is? Would you like your hair cropped short? Have you ever heard of drumhead court martial? (To Patrick.) Send in Lieutenant Chester. (Exit Patrick.) Well, I constitute myself a drumhead court martial. I hereby try you on the charge of causing her majesty's uniforms to appear ridiculous, and I find you guilty of the charge.

(Enter Arthur Chester, in uniform, with Patrick. Arthur makes a move to go to Winifred, is ordered by the colonel to stand still and not to speak. Winifred, who has rushed to Mrs. Desmond, is put back in her place by that lady.)

The Colonel (very grimly)—Have you anything to say before sentence is passed?

Winifred—I didn't mean anything.

The Colonel—Don't cut my hair! I'm—I'm so frightened.

The Colonel—Frightened, are you? Good! Good! The sentence of the court is that you kiss your future uncle-in-law, and then do the same to that other husband.—Sketch.

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